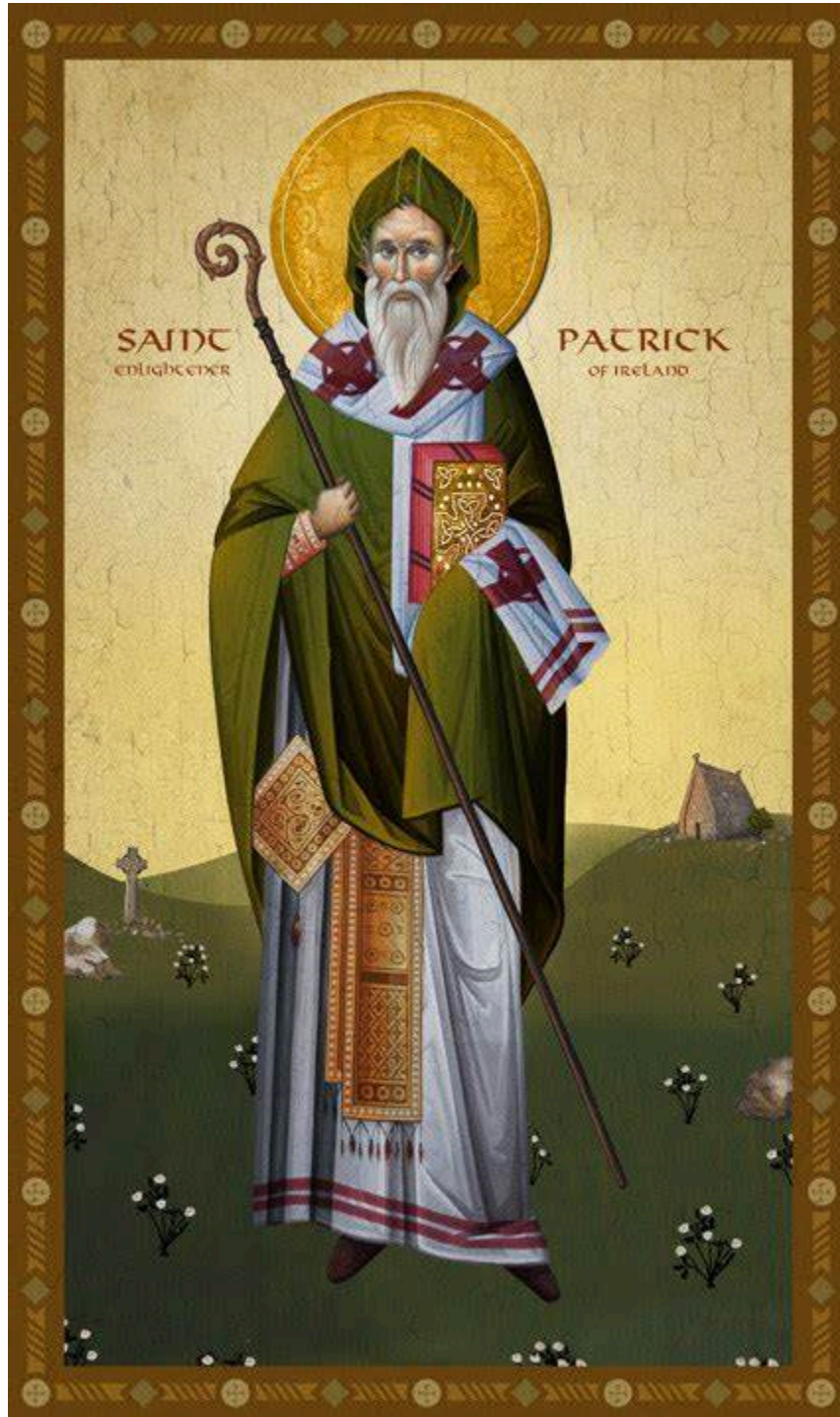


A Prologue of the Orthodox Saints of the West

Fr. Seraphim Rose



Icon of St. Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland

A touchstone of true Orthodoxy is the love for Christ's saints. From the earliest Christian centuries, the Church has celebrated her saints—first the Apostles and martyrs who died for Christ, then the desert-dwellers who crucified themselves for the love of Christ, and the hierarchs and shepherds who gave their lives for the salvation of their flocks.

From the beginning, the Church has treasured the written Lives of these her saints and has celebrated their memory in her Divine services. These two sources — the Lives and services — are extremely important to us today to preserve the authentic Orthodox tradition of faith and piety. The false “enlightenment” of our modern age is so all-pervasive that it draws many Orthodox Christians into its puffed-up “wisdom,” and without their even knowing it, they are taken away from the true spirit of Orthodoxy and left only with the shell of Orthodox rites, formulas, and customs. Almost all Orthodox seminaries today (with the notable exception of Holy Trinity Seminary at Jordanville, New York) are centers for the propagation of modernism in the Church, and even when they cry “back to tradition” or “patristic revival,” this is seldom more than another academic fashion, usually taking its inspiration from Roman Catholic scholarship, and leading not at all back to a truly Orthodox *spirit*, but only to yet more empty forms. To have a seminary education, even to have the “right views” about Orthodox history and theology — is not enough. A typical modern “Orthodox” education produces, more often than not, merely Orthodox rationalists capable of debating intellectual positions with Catholic and Protestant rationalists but *lacking the true spirit and feeling of Orthodoxy*. This spirit and feeling are communicated most effectively in the Lives of saints and similar sources, which speak less of the outward side of correct dogma and rite than of the essential inward side of proper Orthodox attitude, spirit, and piety. Very many of these basic Orthodox sources, already translated into English, are lying unused by Orthodox Christians because a proper Orthodox approach or introduction to them has not been given. Let us attempt here to make this approach, particularly with regard to the Orthodox saints of the West who are as yet so little known to Orthodox Christians in America, even though a number of them have been revered for centuries in the East. May this effort of ours be a fitting “prologue” (we shall see in a moment what this word means in Orthodox literature) to a whole treasure chest of Orthodox texts! May it help us all to put off our vain modern “wisdom” and enter more deeply into the spirit of Orthodox antiquity and its literature.

The earliest Lives of saints were the [*Acts of the Martyrs*](#), followed in the 4th century, when the Egyptian desert began to blossom with monks, by the Lives of ascetics, the first of this form being the [*Life of St. Anthony the Great*](#) by St. Athanasius of Alexandria. Later, collections of such Lives were made. They have been handed down to the present day in such works as the [*Lives*](#) of St. Demetrius of Rostov (+1709) in Slavonic and Russian and the [*Synaxaria*](#) of St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (+1809) in Greek. A person with a modern education must be taught how to approach these works, just as a person trained in classical Western painting must be re-educated to understand the quite different art of the icon. Hagiography, like iconography, is

a sacred art with its own laws, which are quite different from secular art. The Life of a saint is not a mere history of him, but rather a selection of the events in his life which reveal how God has been glorified in him. Its style is devout and often exalted and reverential to give the narration a proper spiritual tone and feeling and arouse the reader's faith and piety. This is why a mere retelling of a saint's life can never replace the original hagiographical account. A "Life" thus differs from a "biography" much as an icon differs from a naturalistic portrait. Apart from the actual Lives of saints, there is a second kind of hagiographical literature in the Orthodox Church. This material has come down to us in the Orthodox *Prologues*, which include both brief Lives and edifying incidents from the lives of holy men and ordinary sinners. The name "Prologue" was given to collections of hagiographical literature as early as the 11th century in Byzantium; soon, they appeared in Slavonic also and became greatly beloved by the Orthodox Russian people.

The *Prologue* is actually one of the *Liturgical* books of the Orthodox Church. It is appointed to be read (not chanted, like the Psalms) after the Sixth Canticle of the Canon at Matins (in the Russian Church; in the Greek Church, the *Synaxaria* are read here). The solemn and didactic prose of this book, giving first of all brief Lives of the saints of the day, does indeed serve as a "prologue" to the liturgical celebration of these saints in the Church's exalted poetry, much as the *Acts of the Martyrs* preceded the liturgical celebration of the martyrs in ancient times; this seems to account for the origin of its name. Yet it is of quite secondary importance whether the *Prologue* is read strictly 'according to the Typicon' at its appointed place in the Divine services. The spirit of the Church is freedom, and various adaptations of ancient practice are possible if only these serve for the edification and piety of the faithful. The *Prologue* (just like the *Lives* of saints) could be read at family morning or evening prayers, at mealtimes, on long winter evenings — a time now lamentably usurped even in most Orthodox homes by television, which inculcates its own crude, worldly tone and feeling. The book read need not be the *Prologue* (which does not exist in English, in any case),* but another book of similar inspiration may be used. Let us here only look briefly at the *Prologue* itself to discover something of its spirit — so important for us who live in the soul-less, spirit-less 20th century — before passing on to a discussion of books of similar inspiration in the West.

In the Slavonic *Prologue* printed at the St. Petersburg Synodal Press in 1896 (two large folio volumes of some 800 pages each — enough in itself to give us a glimpse of what our poor American Orthodoxy lacks!), under the date June 27 (chosen at random) we find the following:

First, "the commemoration of our holy Father Sampson the Hospitable," which gives a brief outline of the good deeds of this Saint (less than half a page). On most days, there are several other similarly brief Lives, but on this day, there is only one Life, followed by several different edifying incidents. The first incident is a "Homily on Martin the Monk who was in Turov at the church of the holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb, living alone in God." This is an account of how Sts.

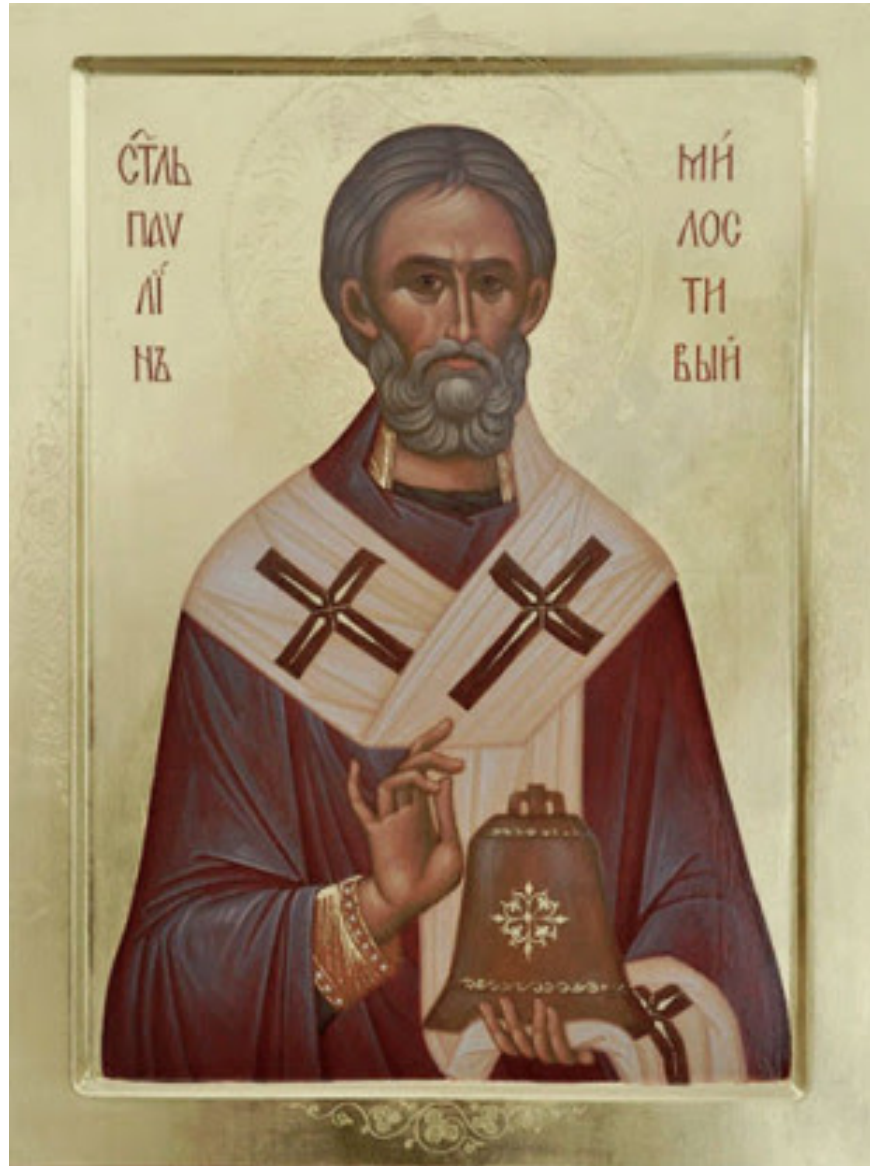
Boris and Gleb appeared to one holy Russian monk in his illness, giving him a drink and healing him (half a page). This is followed by a little longer incident from the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, concerning the Presbyter Severus, who delayed in visiting a dying man and found him dead on his arrival, but by his prayers brought him back to life for seven days so that he might repent of his sins. Similar incidents are taken in other parts of the *Prologue* from such books as the [Lausaic History](#) of Palladius (5th century), the [Spiritual Meadow](#) of John Moschus (6th century), and the [Sayings of the Desert Fathers](#). The final entry for June 27 is a brief Homily “That it is good to visit the sick,” concluding with the Scriptural words of Christ: ‘For I was sick, and ye visited Me,’ and the standard conclusion of every day’s readings: “‘To Him may there be glory, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.’”



[St. Columbanus of Luxeuil](#) († 615)



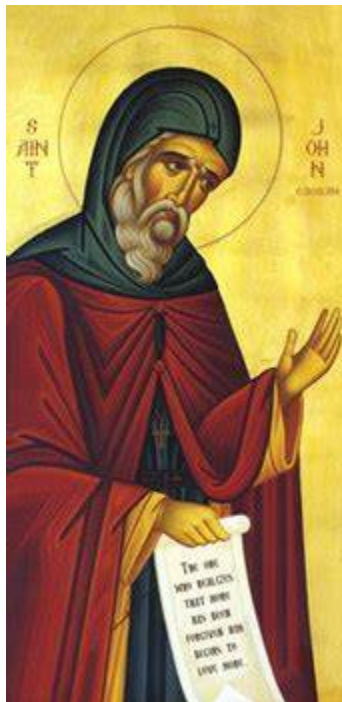
[Icon of St. Clotilda Queen of the Franks](#) († 531)



St. Paulinus of Nola († 431)

It may readily be seen how foreign such readings are to the spirit and taste of our times. These are what might be called by some modern scholar “pious tales” or “miracle stories”; he would disdain them not only for their miracles but just as much for their “moralizing.” But it is just here that the searcher for the true spirit of Orthodoxy must question the “objective” scholar. Why is it that Orthodox Christians for nearly two millennia have found spiritual instruction and nourishment in such stories, and only quite recently, under the strong influence of modern Western “enlightenment,” have our sophisticated Orthodox seminary graduates begun to disdain them? Is it because they are not true? — We shall see below that this is not the case at all. Is it because our Orthodox ancestors were really naive children who needed such tales, but we ourselves, being more sophisticated and mature, can do without them? — But then where do we derive our Orthodox nourishment outside of the few hours a week spent in church and church

schools — from television?! Or could it be that our Orthodox ancestors had something which we lack and which we desperately need to remain truly Orthodox and hand down the unchanging Orthodox faith and piety to our own offspring? Could it be that our ancestors understood something that many of us have lost through acquiring the habit of false, worldly knowledge? Perhaps, indeed, we may find in these miracles and morals that so insult the “modern mind” a missing dimension of the contemporary outlook, which, in its elusive search for a two-dimensional “objectivity” has lost the key to much more of true wisdom than it thinks to have gained. “Scientific objectivity” has come virtually to a dead-end today, and every kind of truth has come into question. But this dead-end for worldly knowledge is perhaps the opening of a way to higher knowledge, wherein truth and life are no longer divorced, where advance in true knowledge is impossible without a corresponding advance in moral and spiritual life. Involuntarily, the converts to Orthodoxy from Western lands — and the Westernized “native Orthodox” as well — have been transported back to that earlier time when the true wisdom of Christianity conquered the proud rationalism of pagan Rome. Let us, therefore, turn back to that earlier time to find something of the freshness and power of Orthodoxy as it conquered the Western mind. There, we shall also find, to our great good fortune, materials for a Western “Prologue” (many of them already in English) not at all inferior to that of the East, as well as keys for understanding it and entering into its spirit.



The lands of the West, from Italy to Britain, knew both the Apostles' preaching and the martyrs' deeds; here, the Christian seed was planted so firmly that the West responded immediately and enthusiastically when it first heard of the great ascetics of Egypt and the East. St. Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony the Great* was quickly translated into Latin, and the best sons and daughters of the West went to the East to learn from the great Fathers there. Many, including Blessed Jerome and the noble Roman ladies Paula and Melania, ended their days in the Holy Land; others, such as the Presbyter Rufinus, went on pilgrimage and brought back such valuable texts as the *History of the Monks of Egypt*; one — St. John Cassian the Roman — learned so thoroughly the spiritual doctrine of the Egyptian Fathers that his books (the *Institutes* and *Conferences*) became the chief foundation of the authentic monastic tradition of the West. The great seedbed of Orthodox monasticism in 5th century Gaul — Lerins — grew up entirely under the influence of the Eastern monastic tradition.

And then, even as the news of the phenomenon of Egyptian monasticism was still spreading through the West, the West produced its own ascetic miracle: St. Martin of Tours. Even before his death in 397, his manuscript *Life* was being circulated in Gaul, Spain, Italy, and elsewhere in

the West, revealing him as a monastic Father and wonderworker in no way inferior to the Desert Fathers in the East. From then on, the West had ascetic examples of its own: to inspire its offspring, as well as able writers of their *Lives*, which to this day remain a chief primary source of the genuine Orthodoxy of the West. Among many others from the 5th to the 8th centuries, one may mention: in Gaul, the Eulogy of St. Honoratus, founder of Lerins, by St. Hilary, his successor as Bishop of Arles, and the Life of St. Germanus of Auxerre by Constantius of Lyons; in Italy, the Life of St. Benedict by St. Gregory the Great (Book II of the *Dialogues*), and the shorter Lives and incidents from the Lives of the Italian Fathers in the same work; in England, the Life of St. Cuthbert by Venerable Bede, and the Life of the great anchorite of the moors, St. Guthlac, by the Monk Felix; in Ireland, the Life of St. Columba by the Monk Adamnan.*

Here, we examine three Western hagiographers from the 5th and 6th centuries more closely. Their spirit is unquestionably and powerfully Orthodox.



[Icon of St. Martin of Tours](#) († 397)

1. SULPICIUS SEVERUS: THE DIALOGUES AND LIFE OF ST. MARTIN

Sulpicius Severus (363-420) is an excellent example of the proud Roman mind conquered by Christianity. Well educated, a successful lawyer, happily married, a writer of Latin prose (as even the critical historian Gibbon notes) in “a style not unworthy of the Augustan age” — he possessed all the characteristics needful for prosperity and success in the decadent Roman world at the turn of the 5th century. And yet, not only was he converted to the still new religion of Christianity, he even abandoned the world. He became the disciple of a wonderworking bishop and the writer of a *Life* of him that astonished the West with its miracles. Modern scholars, whether agnostic or “Christian,” find him to be “one of the puzzles of history” because “no biographer of his period was better qualified to write a truthful life of a contemporary saint and no biographer of his period — we may almost say, of any period — has written a life more full of astounding prodigies.” (F.R. Hoare, [*The Western Fathers*](#), p. 4.)

This “puzzle” remains unsolved for modern scholars, but the answer to it is simple for someone unprejudiced by modern opinions of what is “possible” or “impossible.” Sulpicius, both by his own experience and by the words of eyewitnesses he knew and trusted — discovered that *the miracles of St. Martin were true*, and he wrote of these “astounding prodigies” *only because they were true*. Sulpicius himself writes in the conclusion to his *Life*: “I am clear in my own conscience that my motives for writing were the certainty of the facts and the love of Christ, and that I have only related what is well known, only said what is true.”

We who, even in these decadent latter times, have known Archbishop John Maximovitch († 1966), a wonderworker very similar in many respects to St. Martin, have no difficulty in believing the words of Sulpicius; they ring true to our own Orthodox Christian experience. Only those who do not know the power of Orthodoxy in practice find the *Life of St. Martin* a “puzzle.” In the Christian understanding, it is quite natural for the virtue of a man entirely dedicated to God and living already on earth an Angelic life to result in manifestations which astound mere earthly logic, whether these be revelations of other-worldly humility and meekness or outright miracles. The very word *virtus* in Latin signifies both “virtue” and “power,” which in the Lives of saints is often ‘miraculous power,’ often translated simply as “miracles.”

The Orthodox tradition is by no means credulous in its acceptance of the miracles of saints. Great care is always taken to assure that the Lives of saints contain true accounts and not fables, for it is indeed true that, in the age of “romance” that began in the Western Middle Ages just after Rome’s final separation from the Church of Christ (1054), such fables *were* introduced into many Lives of saints, rendering all later Latin sources especially suspect. On the other hand, Orthodox hagiographers have always taken as their principle the maxim that St. Demetrius of Rostov placed on the first page of his *Lives*: May I TELL NO LIE ABOUT A SAINT. This is also why, in the Orthodox Church, great care is taken to transmit the *original sources* that tell of

the saints: those Lives which are based on the author's immediate experience and the testimony of witnesses known to him personally. Thus, the freshness and marvel of one who personally knew the saint is preserved, and there is transmitted to us directly, "between the lines," as it were, the authentic "tone" of a holy life.

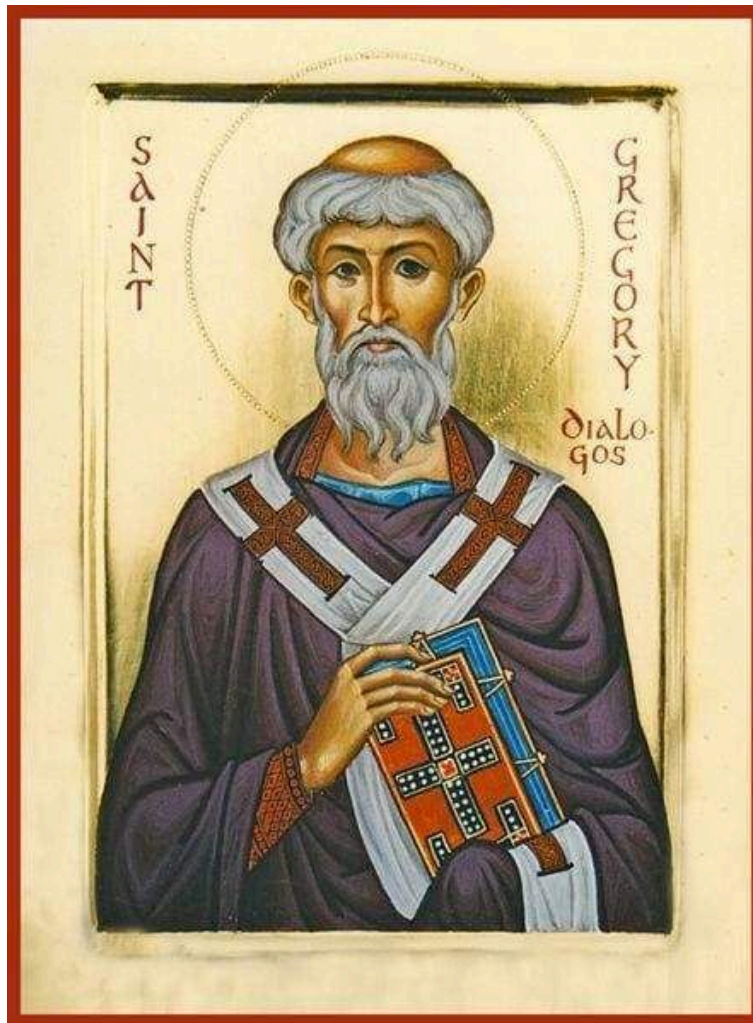
Several years after the death of St. Martin, Sulpicius Severus composed two (sometimes divided into three) "Dialogues" on St. Martin.* This work, again, is greatly criticized by rationalist scholars, not merely for its miracles but even more for its 'anecdotal' character. One critic writes of it that by it "Sulpicius fixed for centuries a hagiographical tradition that rates the anecdotes of wonderworking above spiritual portraiture" (Hoare, *The Western Fathers*, p. 7). This "anecdotal" character is a source of immediate delight for Orthodox Christians and makes the Dialogues of Sulpicius very close in spirit to the *Prologue*. Rationalist scholars are offended by these "anecdotes" because *they have lost the whole picture* into which these fragments fit. Orthodox Christians by no means see in such "anecdotes" the essence of a saint's life and character, but of course, we take delight in the miracles of our saints and do not weary of them, knowing that in these *true stories*, we can already see the breaking into this world of the entirely different laws of the spiritual, heavenly world, which at the end of time will entirely triumph over the laws of this fallen world. For us, every "anecdote" that breathes the spirit of true Christianity in practice is a part of that one Christian life and the model for our own feeble struggle for salvation.

The *Dialogues* of Sulpicius are still somewhat "sophisticated" and, therefore, not as offensive to rationalist critics as later Orthodox works in the West. Sulpicius was trying to communicate to the educated Romans of his day the wonders of the new Christian life and frequently has in mind the weakness of his readers — whether their difficulty in believing some of his accounts or their incapacity to fast like the ascetics of the East. Later, the materials for the Orthodox "Prologue" in the West became more "childlike" — not primarily because the level of education had decreased but because Christianity had entered more deeply into the hearts of the men of the West. Let us follow this development to see if we ourselves can learn from this childlikeness.

2. THE DIALOGUES OF ST. GREGORY THE GREAT (543-604)

The *Dialogues* of Sulpicius (400 A.D.) are an apologetic and missionary work intended to convince men of the truth and power of Christianity, its saints, its miracles, and its monastic life. The *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, Pope of Rome, two centuries later (593) are a recall to spiritual life in a West already Christianized. St. Gregory's situation, then, is also that of us today, for all but the freshest convert have experienced the waning of Christian zeal and the awareness of the need to renourish one's spiritual faculties.

The holy hierarch begins his *Dialogues* in a melancholy frame of mind: “My unhappy soul, weighed down by worldly affairs, calls now to mind in what state it was when I lived in my monastery, and how then it was superior to all earthly matters, far above everything transitory and corruptible, how it did usually think upon nothing but heavenly things.” He is further saddened— but also inspired and roused to zeal — “by remembering the lives of certain notable men, who with their whole soul did utterly forsake and abandon this evil world... very many of whom, in a contemplative and retired kind of life, greatly pleased God.” He proceeds to “report only those things which I myself have understood by the relation of virtuous and credible persons, or else learned by myself, concerning the life and miracles of perfect and holy men.” Thus, the *Dialogues*, too, are one of those original sources that are so important for Orthodox Christians. There follow the four books of the *Dialogues*, which are so much in the genuine Orthodox spirit that it is no wonder that they later became one of the chief sources for the incidents of the Prologue in the East, being very early translated into Greek, and earned for St. Gregory the name by which he is known to this day in the Orthodox Church: THE DIALOGIST.



St. Gregory the Dialogist († 604)

Two of the books are devoted to the saints of Italy who lived before St. Gregory — sometimes their Lives, but more often just incidents from their lives which are capable of arousing piety and zeal. The Second Book, however, is devoted entirely to one saint who inspired St. Gregory in Italy much as St. Martin inspired Sulpicius in Gaul: St. Benedict (+543), a great Holy Father of Western monasticism. This book constitutes the earliest Life of this great Orthodox saint, who has long had his place —just like St. Gregory himself (March 12) —in the Orthodox Calendars of the East (March 14).

The first three books of the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory are, quite frankly, “miracle stories,” and the great hierarch makes no apology for handing them down: these are the material of Christian hope and inspiration, and so deeply had the West become Orthodox at this time that it received them eagerly. But the Fourth Book of the *Dialogues* is the crowning insult to the modern rationalist: these he would surely dismiss as “ghost stories.” The Fourth Book contains accounts — just as true and trustworthy as the “miracle stories”? — which demonstrates the truth of life after death. There are profitable tales of the departure of men’s souls, the state of souls in heaven and hell, the return of souls to their bodies after death, various apparitions of souls after death, and the like. Very similar tales may be found in a superb Orthodox book in England over a century later: the [*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*](#), by Venerable Bede (Book V, chapters 12-14).

It must be said that the graduates of the modernist Orthodox seminaries, and “sophisticated” Orthodox today in general, find this part of ancient Christian literature the most difficult to accept. A few years ago, a book of similar inspiration appeared in English: [*Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave*](#), subtitled “Orthodox Teachings on the Existence of God, the Immortality of the Soul, and Life Beyond the Grave” (Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, N. Y., 1968). This work, the fruit of the missionary fervour of Archimandrite Panteleimon of Jordanville, consists of excerpts from the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory, the *Lives of Saints*, and similar standard Orthodox works, as well as Russian religious books and periodicals of the 19th century which give more recent incidents in the same spirit, together with excellent introductions to these excerpts, simple and straightforward and with just the right moral and pious tone so lacking in most Orthodox writings today. While not an original source like St. Gregory’s *Dialogues*, the book is of great value for Orthodox Christians. Anyone who has tried to interest children in Orthodox reading is well aware that this book, as perhaps no other book that now exists in English, is absolutely fascinating to children; a child of ten or twelve, if he first hears some of the profitable tales in it being read aloud at a family gathering, will later quite likely take the book himself and literally devour it, so interesting is it — not merely because the tales are “exciting” and quite capable of competing with the banal ghost stories of our day, but even more because he knows that these stories are true and teach the truths of our Orthodox Faith. How much energy ‘Orthodox

educators' waste trying to arouse the interest of children in such inappropriate and soul-corrupting materials as cartoons and colouring books — while such a genuinely fascinating and authentic Orthodox book they overlook or disdain? Why is this? The answer to this question may clear away some of the difficulties that stand in the way of making maximum use of genuine Orthodox literature today.

In the 19th century, Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, a great Orthodox Father of recent times, faced a similar problem when he tried to teach the Orthodox doctrine of heaven and hell, good and evil spirits, and life after death to the Orthodox people of his time. Many “sophisticated” Christians objected precisely because their own ideas of these realities were based on Roman Catholic and Protestant, not Orthodox, ideas, and so Bishop Ignatius devoted one entire volume of his collected works (v. 3) to this question, giving both the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic teaching. He found that the Orthodox doctrine on all these questions — even though it does not, of course, tell us everything about them — is quite precise in what it teaches, based on Patristic writings such as the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory. At the same time, Roman Catholicism, under the influence especially of modern philosophy from Descartes onwards, has come to teach a doctrine in which spiritual realities become increasingly vague, corresponding to the ever-greater preoccupation of modern men with material things. Most Orthodox Christians today have picked up this modernist-Papist teaching “in the air” of the contemporary world. Therefore, if we do not consciously strive to discover the truth, we will be embarrassed when presented with the Orthodox teaching, which is so definite, especially about the experiences of the soul after death. If we believe this teaching, after all, we shall certainly be considered ““naive” and “simple” even by other believers, let alone by unbelievers. Some, in their embarrassment, may come to think that these Orthodox teachings, which are so foreign to what ‘everybody thinks’ nowadays, are themselves somehow suspect. They can point to Roman Catholics who claim that the Fourth Book of St. Gregory's *Dialogues* teaches the Latin doctrine of Purgatory. Fortunately, however, this accusation has already been raised and answered for us. Roman Catholic scholars proclaimed this very thing at the false council of Florence in 1439, and St. Mark of Ephesus, the champion of Orthodoxy, gave the authoritative Orthodox answer: the teaching of St. Gregory in his *Dialogues* is Orthodox, and in fact he clearly teaches against Purgatory.*

The *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great and *Eternal Mysteries Beyond the Grave* are excellent medicine for today's over-sophisticated Orthodox Christians. They can be a touchstone for us: if, reading them, we find them “naive,” “too realistic,” or otherwise distasteful, we can know that we are still too “sophisticated,” not childlike and simple enough in our Orthodoxy. If we are converts, we can know that we have not yet entered enough into the genuine spirit of Orthodoxy; if we are “native Orthodox,” we can know that our Orthodoxy has been corrupted by false modern Roman Catholic ideas. We will have to struggle harder to approach such basic Orthodox literature like children, without all our supposed “wisdom.” Those who are accustomed to reading the Orthodox literature of Christian antiquity have no difficulty with such books.

3. THE BOOKS OF MIRACLES OF ST. GREGORY OF TOURS

No writer in Latin in the Orthodox West was more devoted to the saints of Christ's Church nor more prolific in his praises of them than St. Gregory, Bishop of Tours (539-594). Although he is chiefly known today for his *History of the Franks*, he is more important to Orthodox Christians for his eight *Books of Miracles*, which are usually called his “minor works.” In this 6th century writer of Gaul there breathes the very spirit of the Orthodox East and the *Prologue*. Being especially under the influence of St. Martin, his own predecessor in the See of Tours, from whom he received miraculous healings, he devoted four of the eight books of this work to The Miracles (or rather, Virtues) of Blessed Martin the Bishop. But he also took all the saints as his concern, writing one book on [*The Glory of the Blessed Martyrs*](#), another on *The Passion and Miracles of St. Julian the Martyr*, another on [*The Life of the Fathers*](#), and a final one on *The Glory of the Confessors*. Taken together, these books — which deal mostly with the saints of Gaul—constitute the largest hagiographical material on the Orthodox saints of any land in antiquity. His aim in writing is moral and didactic, and he consciously turns his back on pagan learning. He himself writes: “We ought to pursue, to write, to speak that which edifies the Church of God and by sacred teaching enriches needy minds by the knowledge of perfect faith. For we ought not to recall the lying stories, or to follow the wisdom of the philosophers which is hostile to God, lest we fall under the judgement of eternal death by the decision of the Lord... I do not recall in my work the flight of Saturn, the wrath of Juno, the adulteries of Jupiter... Having glanced at all these events built on sand and soon to perish, we return rather to divine and evangelical miracles’ (*The Glory of the Blessed Martyrs*, Preface).

“Miracles,” indeed, are the subject matter as well as the title of these books. If rationalistic scholars are offended at the many miracles in the [*History of the Franks*](#), they are absolutely scandalised by the *Books of Miracles*, which abound in them. But the reason why he writes of them, again, is because they are true, and he is careful to point out that he writes only what he knows from personal experience (having known many of the saints himself and witnessed many miracles) or from the testimony of reliable people. Thus, these books also are invaluable original sources of Christianity in practice.

Although St. Gregory is known in the East and mentioned in Orthodox Patrologies,* his writings were not translated into Greek or Slavonic. His concern was too much with the West, and the East already had numerous collections on Eastern saints in exactly the same spirit.** More surprising, however, is it that the *Books of Miracles* (save for a few excerpts) has never been translated into English. This can only be a testimony to the rationalist superstition that has prevailed in the West in modern times, and also to the dying out of interest in the Orthodox saints of the West which has been continuing for many centuries now. Another reason why he has been disdained in the West is that his language falls short of the standards of classical Latin. He

himself recognizes this and states that he undertook his *Books of Miracles* only at the command of the Lord in visions. In one dream, when protesting to his mother his lack of skill in writing, he received from her this answer: “Do you not know that on account of the ignorance of our people the way you can speak is considered more intelligible? So do not hesitate or delay doing this, because it will be a charge against you if you pass over these deeds in silence” (The Miracles of Blessed Martin the Bishop, Preface to the First Book). Even Blessed Augustine, as is well known, was reproached for his shortcomings in classical Latin, and he gave a sufficient reply, which will do for an answer to the detractors of St. Gregory's Latin also: “It is better that the grammarians reproach us than that the people not understand us.”

Archbishop John Maximovitch of blessed memory gave as his testament to the Orthodox Christians of the West his love for the saints of Western lands. In fulfilment of this testament we now offer, as a separate book, the first English translation of the whole of the seventh of St. Gregory's Books of Miracles — 'THE LIFE OF THE FATHERS. No apology is necessary for presenting these twenty chapters on the monastic saints of Gaul in the 5th and 6th centuries. For the Orthodox Christian they are fascinating reading; the edifying homily that precedes each Life is most instructive for our spiritual struggle today; the spirit of the book is entirely Orthodox, and the Orthodox practices described in it have remained the inheritance of Orthodox Christians (but not of Roman Catholics) today, including the veneration of the “icons of saints” (the Latin text has 7conicas instead of the more to be expected imagines) in chapter 12; and some of the incidents, just like the stories of the desert Fathers, have precise relevance for our problems today — for example, the story of the “charismatic” deacon who “healed in the name of Jesus” until St. Friardus exposed him as being in satanic deception (ch. 10).

It is our heartfelt wish that this book will take its place, together with the *Dialogues* of St. Gregory the Great, the *Lausiac History* of Palladius, and other BASIC ORTHODOX SOURCE-BOOKS, as part of the daily reading of those who are struggling for their salvation on the narrow Orthodox path. May it be read silently; may it be read aloud; may it become, like the other great books of Christian antiquity, a source of piety and the true spirit of Orthodoxy which is everywhere being overpowered today by the spirit of the world. May it help us in the all-important struggle to become and remain conscious Orthodox Christians, knowing what is the path of salvation, what is the savour of true Christianity, and how far we all fall short of these. May it be for us a beginning, a prologue, of true Christianity in practice!

-
- * Years after this article was written, [*The Prologue from Ochrid*](#) was published in English.
 - Easily accessible collections of such original Lives in English include: The Western Fathers (chiefly of Gaul), ed. by F. R. Hoare, Harper Torchbooks, 1965; Lives of the Saints (of England), tr. by J. F. Webb, Penguin Books, 1970; Anglo-Saxon Saints and

Heroes, tr. by Clinton Albertson, Fordham University Press, 1967; The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries in Germany, tr. by C. H. Talbot, Sheed & Ward, N.Y., 1954.

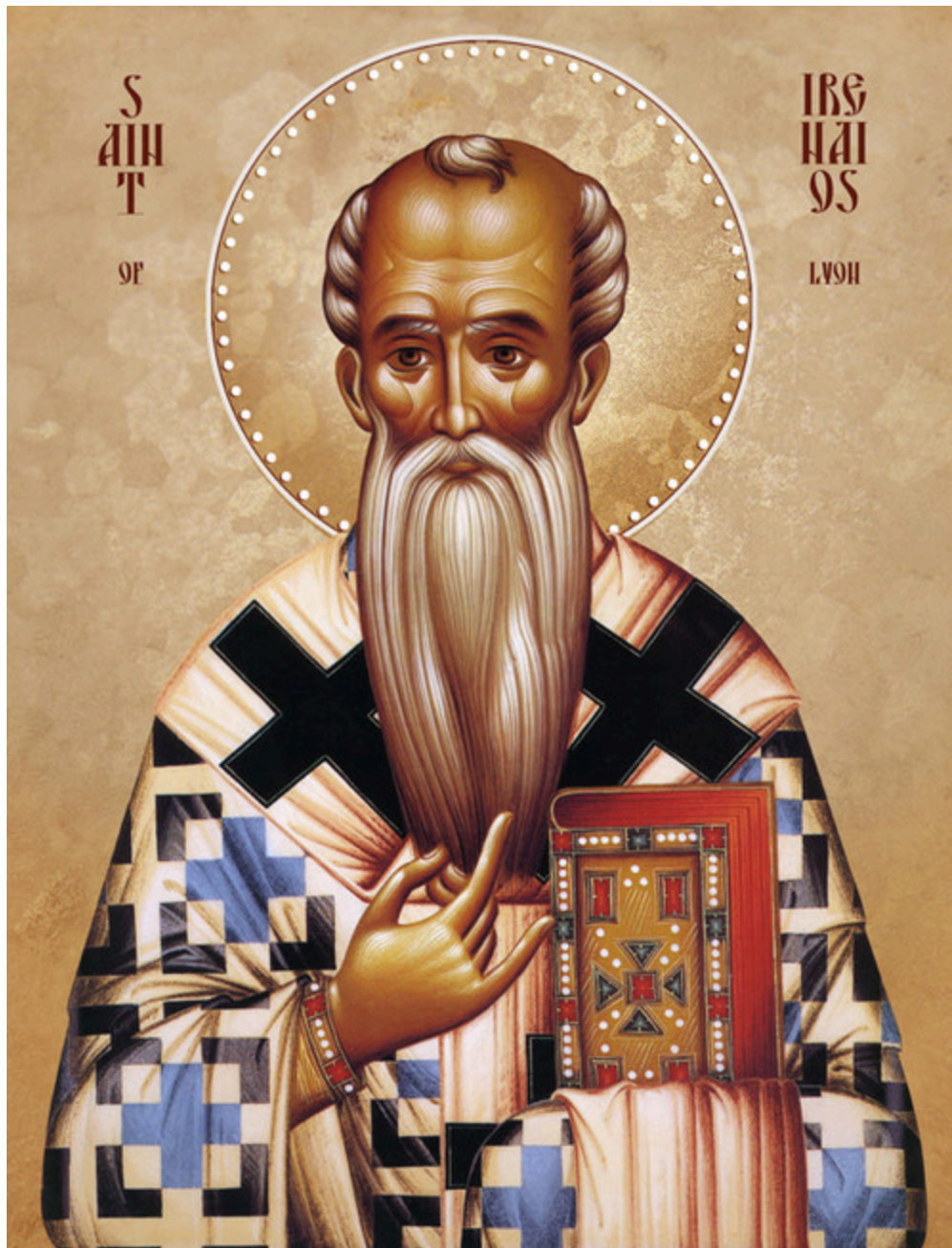
- § English translation, together with the Life of St. Martin and Sulpicius' Letters about the Saint, in Hoare, The Western Fathers.
- § St. Mark of Ephesus, "First Homily on Purgatorial Fire (Refutation of the Latin Chapters)," ch. 9; "Second Homily on Purgatorial Fire," ch. 23:9.
- * For example, in the Patrology of Archbishop Philaret of Chernigov, St. Petersburg, 1882, vol. 3, section 191.
- §§ One of them, The History of the Lovers of God by Blessed Theodoret (5th century) — a collection of Lives of the Syrian Fathers — is an exact parallel to St. Gregory's Life of the Fathers.



[Icon of St. Benedict of Nursia](#) († 431)



[Icon of St. Ambrose of Milan](#) († 431)



[Icon of St. Irenaios of Lyon \(Irenaeus\)](#) († 431)



[Icon of St. Germanus of Paris](#) († 431)